

[W. J. D. Carr]

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Interview

Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

W.J.D. Carr, old time rancher of Sherwood, Texas, was born in the Indian Territory before it became the state of Oklahoma. His father was principal of the Broomfield Academy, a government school for Indian girls, and Mr. Carr was ten years old before he ever saw a white child.

"When I was a small boy in the Indian Territory," says Mr. Carr, "I got the fright of my life. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 My father was a very quiet, dignified man and our family had never been accustomed to much excitement, even though I was reared within a mile's ride of the painted Indian and wild buffalo I never saw either. But to tell you of my fright, we were all seated around the supper table when all at once we heard foot steps and the rattle of spurs on our front porch, then the sound of heavy treads coming right on in our front door. 'Hands up.' sounded a deep, gruff voice and we all looked at father and saw his hands go up and we did likewise. 'I am General Price,' announced the deep voice, 'and we only want food.' 'General Price,' exclaimed my father in friendly relief, 'then we are friends, I am from Texas too,' and at that the general smiled and ordered us to put down our hands. Friendliness followed and the general was effusive in apologizing, saying that

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he had had so many dangerous experiences that he was not taking any chances when he started out for food.

"I guess I was a pretty tame guy when I grew up and hit Texas as a ranch hand in my twenties. I managed to start off with sheep though, right here on Spring Creek, which was some tamer then the cow business and sort of helped to toughen up the soft spots before I got in with the real cowboys. I was with the Stillson and Chase outfit and we took 1500 head of sheep to Central Kansas in the dry year of '86. We crossed all the big rivers between here and there and found them dry. There was no grass, just leaves for the sheep to eat. It rained 3 in sight of us nearly every day we were out but not a drop on us. Truly we felt like the children of Israel. This trip was uneventful except for the memory of the drouth's severity. After I returned I got a job as cook for the 4-Cross L's. I worked there quite awhile and managed somehow to keep them from knowing that I was as green as I was, about the cow business. It came time for the boys to go into San Angelo to celebrate and I went along and played my hand pretty well at hiding my ignorance, for I knew there was no end to what they would do to me if they knew I was half as green as I was. I bought me a pair of chaps and a big hat and was doing my bit at helping toot 'em up in the days when San Angelo was considered wild and woolly. I can tell you right now though that there wasn't half as much danger in San Angelo then as there is now.

"I worked my way into the good graces of my boss and soon he was sending me out on the drives just like the other boys. He sent me with a hundred head of cattle from Lamar County to Mason and sent a negro boy along to help me with them. That was the sleepest negro I ever saw and I had all the work to do, myself, and try to keep that boy awake besides. I drove them right down what is now Main Street in Dallas and had to hold them over for the Trinity River to run down before I could cross. We held the cattle three days on the exact grounds where the Centennial was held. This was in 1881 and 4 Dallas lacked a lot of reaching out that far then.

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"Like all old cowhands I had the usual and some very unusual experiences. The wildest stampede I ever witnessed was on the Sam Capps Ranch in Mason County. We were delivering 1,000 yearlings to another ranch and had camped for the night with the yearlings all rounded up and as we thought, about ready to bed down. They were all still but just bawl, bawl was all we could hear. All at once that bawling ceased as suddenly as if they had every one been shot at once. Several of the boys had laid down and were asleep but they were old cowhands and at the sudden cessation of the bawling one boy came to his feet shouting, 'Look out! Stampede!' He hadn't more then said it then they were off like a thunderstorm. They went right through a worm rail fence and piled rails ten feet high right where the boys lay sleeping. We grabbed our horses and were after them at once. They were easier to control than grown cattle and we got them stopped for the night in time to get a pretty good night's sleep after all but they were the wildest, worst scared things while they were running that I have ever seen.

"The biggest round-up I ever saw was in May of '87. It had been dry in '85 and '86 and in May of '87 we had rain in old Tom Green County. Cattle come from everywhere, even hundreds of miles across the country. It took three days to work the round-up and for each owner to get his cattle. 5 "Cowboys had many dangerous experiences and narrow escapes, like down on the Middle Concho once we were all watching a bull fight between two big old Spanish Bulls. After awhile one out did the other and seemingly to celebrate his victory he ran under Buck Porter's horse and turned him completely over, Buck was sitting sidewise on his horse and it looked like he went about ten feet high. As he came down right on the old bull's horns he was grazed clear around the stomach and only escaped death by a miracle.

"Speaking of Englishmen, I have heard that Claud Anson who ranched all over the west was in direct line for an Earldom. He specialized in fancy polo ponies and had eaten at our wagon many times.

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"The English people were very amusing. One of them who ranched near us had some of "blooded" friends from the Mother Country to visit him and they walked down to our pens one morning and one of the fancy guys rared back and said to me, 'I'll betcha \$50.00 that negro boy can't ride that big bull lying over there.' 'I'll take your bet,' I says as I winked at the boy. 'Get on him lying down now,' ordered the smart man, and the little negro looked at me with all the mischief in the world in his big eyes. I nodded and Pete crawled on. The old bull lazily got up, stretched his tail and started walking off. 'That's the bull that Pete rides after the milch cows,' I said. In deep chagrin the Englishmen paid off and left. 6 "The English were no more comical, trying to ranch than the few Jews who came here and tried it. One old Jew by the name of Gronsky had a little money so he bought him a string of sheep and a section of land near Colorado, Texas. When neighboring ranchmen began talking of lambing he got all excited and began asking some of the fellows around, how many men he would need to help with the lambing. We told him several, so he hired four and kept them about two weeks. When no lambs came he began to investigate and found that every sheep he had was a ram. The old devil had a way of taking his herd over on any and everybody's grass to graze them. Will McCoy caught him over on his ranch for about the tenth time and Will had enough of it. He walked up to him and said, 'Now see here Abie, if you don't get those d— sheep off my grass, I'm going to kick your old bottom clear out of the county.' 'Yes and while you are kickin' me bottom, me sheep will be eating the more of your grass,' Abie replied, with much satisfaction.

"Wash Tankersley and Charley Binson were the best ropers I ever saw. I saw them rope 500 calves once, each by the forefoot and not miss a throw. I told that once at a small gathering and an old East Texas farmer rose up and says, 'Who told you that d—n lie?'

"A Dutch boy was the best rider I ever saw. He learned to ride by penning wild horses and running them through a gate and dropping off on their backs. I never 7 saw a horse throw him.

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"Jimmie Craig was just a kid in our bunch and he was a wonder for distinguishing horses. He could identify and tell something different about any horse out of hundreds and he was never mistaken.

"I felt so sorry about an other boy, I wont tell his name but he was a good boy and just happened to fall into bad company and get in jail. We had for a time through here, a self appointed vigilance committee (Vigilantes) who were supposed to aid the law in suppressing cattle rustling, etc. They abused the cause of their duties as is usually the case. When this boy was put in jail they rode by, threw a turpentine, lighted ball through his cell window and shot him by this light as he lay asleep on his bunk.

"The Ketchum boys were fine fellows to be around just in a social way, but they were of a reckless, devil-may-care sort, who thought only of easy money. The Indian Territory was fertile soil for them in the boot-legging days.

"I have also seen Quantrall and his men around Sherman, when they were said to have been on one of their prowling raids.

"I knew a woman once who worked for the McCrowans on the Pecos for several years making every one, even the boss think she was a man. She really had a little beard and looked for all the world like any other cowboy. Her regalia or get-up was perfect and she could do anything any other cowboy could do. Finally she fell in love with the commissary sergeant at Fort McKavett and married him. They were both educated dudes and I guess too much alike to get along. Anyway, they separated and several years later one of the cowboys saw her at a dance at Ben Ficklin all dressed up fit to kill and he eased up to her and said, 'Jack, what in the hell are you doing here like this?' 'Like what?' she asked. 'Why, like a woman.' says he. 'I've been a woman all the time,' she told him. 'My God!' exclaimed the cowboy, 'Let me out of here to the fresh air.' We never knew of her trying to pass as a boy again and never knew the real cause of her doing so that time but she certainly made a neat job of the act.

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"There in nothing I enjoy better than the stockmen's convention at Fort Worth. Last year I saw two hundred or more of the old boys on given name terms. 'Hey! John,' or 'Hello Bill,' could he heard on every side.

"I went back to Mason County in 1935 and walked out to an old worm rail fence that I had split rails for in 1880. 'I'm going to take one back to Spring Creek with me.' I told my son, and I just put it in my car and have it standing up in the corner in that room there now. Sometimes if I live long enough I hope to write a book about myself, of all my ups and downs." Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

W.J.D. Carr, Sherwood, Texas, interviewed, November 18, 1937.